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ABSTRACT

Florida requires all students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 to demonstrate mastery of minimum performance standards using the Florida Student State Assessment Test (SSAT) forms for the appropriate grade level. The tests are administered in October and cover reading, writing, and mathematics. Current practices used to prepare students for the SSAT include giving students practice items for the skills to be tested. Students and teachers are given feedback on an item-by-item basis, but are seldom given summaries, item analyses, or class performance profiles. Organization of the practice items into a test format similar to that of the actual SSAT allows students and teachers to take advantage of all the statistics available through that approach. This article covers such an approach for diagnostic and prescriptive preparation for the SSAT as conducted at Lakeview Middle School in Sanford (Florida). The preparation test was administered to all eighth graders in September of 1987. Answer sheets were processed by the district Educational Data Processing department, and results were summarized and returned 3 weeks prior to the formal SSAT. This allowed teachers to cover the identified educational deficits. In general, the diagnostic/prescriptive approach was successful. Three tables, illustrating the percent of students mastering each skill, provide data for 274 eighth-graders on the preparation test and 285 eighth-graders on the SSAT in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. (TJH)

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# DIAGNOSTIC AND PRESCRIPTIVE PREPARATION FOR THE FLORIDA STUDENT STATE ASSESSMENT TEST

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The state of Florida requires all students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 to demonstrate mastery of minimum performance standards in those grades. To this end, the students are tested in October using the Florida Student State Assessment Test (SSAT) for the appropriate grade level. The SSAT test skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, organized by standards. There are six standards in reading, representing twenty-seven skills, ten standards in writing, representing forty skills, and twenty standards in mathematics, representing fifty-one skills. Any unachieved skills must be remediated by the end of the school year. Any student who doesn't complete remediation of an unachieved skill will be considered for retention in that grade for the subsequent school year.

Current practices being used to prepare students for the Florida SSAT include giving students practice items for the skills that are to be tested. Students and teachers are consequently given feedback on an item-by-item basis, but seldom are given summaries, item analyses, or class performance profiles. By organizing practice items into a test format similar to the actual SSAT, students and teachers can take advantage of all of the statistics which are available through that approach.

The preparation test used at Lakeview Middle School is with just such a format. In collaboration with the systems analysts at the School Board of Seminole County, I have written a preparation test for the Florida SSAT keyed to the CROSS program (Criterion Referenced Objective Scoring System). With this program, answer sheets are read into the computer giving results that show mastery of specific skills by:

1. individual student
2. class summary
3. teacher summary
4. school summary

With this information, teachers and administrators can identify mastery of specific skills and target those deficits prior to the administering of the SSAT. By teaching to these well-defined deficits, schools can anticipate higher test scores.

The preparation test was administered to all eighth grade students in September. The answer sheets were processed by the district EDP department with results being summarized and returned three weeks prior to the formal SSAT. During that time, teachers taught to the identified deficits with a good degree of success, as shown in the SSAT RESULTS. Of the forty-nine skills tested on the preparation test, thirty-three skills improved, fourteen skills regressed, and two skills remained the same, as measured against the SSAT.

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In the opinion of the faculty and staff, the SSAT performance was improved by the administering of the preparation test and using the statistical results in a scientific manner. Specifically, by summarizing the results by skill, the faculty was able to prioritize teaching to the deficits. Although the approach of teaching to a test can be a point for debate among educators, this faculty committed to teaching to the objectives as defined by the test without any professional misgivings.

At the completion of the SSAT program, several conclusions became evident:

1. Teachers addressed deficits, not strengths. Consequently, not reinforcing strengths can cause performance in that area to drop.

2. By using group summarized data, teachers gave meaning to the preparation test results, as opposed to trying to establish trends from 275 individual scores.

3. Taking the SSAT three weeks after the preparation test had a tendency to keep test taking skills sharp, in spite of the potential for burnout from too much testing.

4. Although the diagnostic/prescriptive approach was successful, its real effectiveness will not be known unless a controlled experiment is conducted using experimental and control groups.

Attachments (3) Comparison of Preparation Test and SSAT
FB/rp

SSAT READING: FALL, 1987

(PERCENT OF STUDENTS MASTERING EACH SKILL)

| SKILL | PREPARATION TEST (N-274) | SSAT (N-285) |
|---|---|---|
| A 2 | 96 | 90 |
| B 8 | 95 | 94 |
| C 12 | 60 | 86 |
| C 13 | 88 | 95 |
| C 14 | 85 | 88 |
| C 15 | 88 | 92 |
| D 17 | 75 | 91 |
| D 19 | 56 | 60 |
| D 20 | 73 | 82 |
| D 21 | 77 | 70 |
| E 23 | 76 | 78 |
| F 25 | 85 | 94 |
| F 26 | 91 | 85 |
| F 27 | 83 | 91 |
| | $\overline{X}$ = 81 | $\overline{X}$ = 85 |

SSAT WRITING: FALL, 1987

(PERCENT OF STUDENTS MASTERING EACH SKILL)

| SKILL | PREPARATION TEST (N=274) | SSAT (N=285) |
|---|---|---|
| A 10 | 80 | 83 |
| A 11 | 83 | 85 |
| D 29 | 80 | 77 |
| D 31 | 84 | 85 |
| E 40 | 72 | 85 |
| F 44 | 96 | 85 |
| F 45 | 97 | 94 |
| G 55 | 90 | 82 |
| H 68 | 74 | 88 |
| I 72 | 90 | 97 |
| I 73 | 90 | 95 |
| I 74 | 78 | 88 |
| | $\overline{X}$ = 85 | $\overline{X}$ = 87 |

SSAT MATHEMATICS: FALL, 1987

(PERCENT OF STUDENTS MASTERING EACH SKILL)

| SKILL | PREPARATION TEST (N = 274) | SSAT (N = 285) |
|---|---|---|
| A 11 | 91 | 95 |
| B 14 | 93 | 86 |
| B 15 | 80 | 96 |
| D 28 | 94 | 81 |
| D 29 | 91 | 87 |
| D 30 | 73 | 88 |
| D 31 | 44 | 44 |
| G 55 | 91 | 93 |
| H 60 | 91 | 87 |
| H 61 | 77 | 84 |
| I 65 | 57 | 75 |
| I 66 | 69 | 73 |
| I 67 | 87 | 90 |
| J 73 | 83 | 94 |
| J 74 | 64 | 84 |
| K 76 | 79 | 63 |
| K 77 | 62 | 68 |
| Q 114 | 76 | 85 |
| S 128 | 85 | 88 |
| S 129 | 71 | 31 |
| T 135 | 59 | 82 |
| T 139 | 75 | 86 |
| V 146 | 81 | 81 |
| | $\overline{X}$ = 77 | $\overline{X}$ = 80 |